

The University of Chicago

THE SCHOLIA OF
BARHEBRAEUS ON THE BOOK OF
THE TWELVE PROPHETS

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE
AND INTERPRETATION

1933

By

FRANK GARRETT WARD

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The publication of the first volume of the Scholia of Barhebraeus¹ heralds the definite inauguration of a project for the production of a critical text of the Old Testament in Syriac. The final culmination of such an enterprise will be a matter of years, but sufficient progress has been made to permit of a preliminary report. A deficiency in the tools of scholarship, implied in the complete absence hitherto of any adequately critical edition of the Peshitto, may in time be made good if the present enterprise moves on steadily to completion.

One need not await the distant future, however, for partial satisfaction of scholarly necessities in relation to the form and use of the Old Testament in Syriac. The significant textual and exegetical values of the writings of the Fathers have been clearly indicated in connection with, for instance, the Cambridge study of the Septuagint. So it is with the Peshitto. The Syriac Fathers provide a natural and proper starting point from which one may progress into the basic text which lay before them. Accordingly the University of Chicago project for the production of a critical Peshitto text has begun with the Storehouse of Mysteries of Barhebraeus, and will move back through the wide range of Syriac patristic literature. The volume already referred to therefore serves as a first exemplar of a series

¹Barhebraeus' Scholia on the Old Testament, Part I: Genesis - II Samuel; Martin Sprengling and William Creighton Graham, Chicago, 1931.

planned to furnish materials immediately useful. It will also suggest the nature of the ultimate text.

Materials for another volume in the series are already well in hand. Doctoral dissertations are practically completed on the remaining Old Testament Scholias of Barhebraeus. Each dissertation has involved the translation of the basic manuscript, designated as No. 1 by Messrs. Sprengling and Graham, together with the collation of the same against about nineteen other manuscripts.¹ The general editors of the project assume responsibility for the co-ordination and editing of the work of the younger students, and the preparation of materials for the press. Theirs also has been the task of furnishing most of the special annotations which have accompanied the translation so far printed.

The Syriac Father whose works furnish the immediate materials of investigation, Gregorius, Abu al-Faraj, customarily called Barhebraeus, is entitled to much more extended acquaintance than has been his lot so far among Biblical and theological scholars.² In an age of confusion and disorder--within state and church alike--he stood as a figure of fine dignity, ceaseless industry, and steadfast integrity worthy of a happier age. His life spanned a substantial part of the thirteenth century, when the Mongol invasions were convulsing Western Asia as well as China. Within such a disturbed situation, Barhebraeus undertook with indefatigable labor to elevate the tone of thought and to widen the intellectual viewpoint of his contemporaries, Christian,

¹ Miscellaneous prolegomena, including detailed descriptions and evaluations of the manuscripts used, will appear in the third or a fourth volume. This will present a statement of principles on which the establishment of a critical text will proceed.

² That he is now coming into his own is further evidenced by the admirable edition of the Chronography by Dr. E. A. Wallis Budge, London, 1932, vol. i, English translation; vol. ii, Facsimile of Bodleian Ms. Hunt No. 52.

Mohammedan and Mongol. He travelled widely, promoted the building of churches and monasteries, ordained priests and bishops; and above all, for our present purpose, produced many books on a remarkably wide scale of subject matter.

The record of his writings¹ shows a breadth of knowledge on his part that is astounding. One need not claim for his work great originality, and yet he was no mere copyist. All that he touched is surcharged with a dignity and worth that make him a real contributor to the world's wisdom. The purposes underlying his vast literary productivity appear to be found in his desire to renew the vitality of the Syriac language and literature, to furnish his own people (through translations) with the best ancient literature and philosophy conserved in Arabic, and also, if possible, to christianize the Mongol invaders, or at the very least to win from them an attitude of cordial appreciation for the religion and culture which he represented. In the latter enterprise he was quite successful. His task as Maphrian ("Fructifier") was to resuscitate the Church; but the non-Mohammedanism of the earliest Mongol invaders offered a larger arena for Christian missionary activity, and with hopefulness he pressed into that situation. It was however too much to hope that any one man, no matter how gifted or diligent, could support the rapidly fading glories of the Christian religion and its ancient literature, when his own associates were of such poor stuff, and all were

¹ Cf. Wm. Wright, in article "Syriac Literature," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 9th edition, vol. 22, pp. 853-855; A. Baumstark, Geschichte der syrischen Literature (Bonn, 1922), pp. 312-320. The foregoing are all based upon the list prepared after the death of Barhebraeus and appended to the Ecclesiastical History by his brother, Bar-sauma Safi; cf. J. B. Abbeloos and T. J. Lamy, Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum (Paris 1877), vol. ii, pp. 467-485; also J. S. Assemanus, Bibliotheca Orientalis (Rome, 1721), vol. ii, pp. 267-272; and most recently Budge, op. cit., vol. i, pp. xxxii-xxxvi.

being overwhelmed by the flood of alien cultures.

In the Middle Ages the Holy Book, the eternal revelation of divine salvation, occupied in every respect the centre of the stage and had the spotlight shining full upon it. Around it men great and small wove all they knew of science, art, culture and life. More than one man put his all into comments on the Bible.¹

A selection of representative passages from the Scholia of Barhebraeus on the Minor Prophets, will indicate the general nature and contents of the Storehouse of Mysteries, wherein our present author furnished his Church with a running commentary upon what he believed to be the more important or the more obscure passages of the Bible. The invariable procedure is to quote verbatim a passage from the Peshitto, followed by the phrase "that is," with a shorter or longer exposition.

Hosea 1:2

"The Lord said to Hosea: Go, take to thyself a wife who is a harlot."

"That is, God commands the prophet that, not by words alone but by deed, he put to shame those who commit harlotry with idols; perhaps they would be restrained when they saw the chaste prophet yielding to such things as these."

Amos 8:6

"And poor men for the sake of refuse."

"That is, worn out clothes. And according to some the poor straw which is left on the threshing floor. And among us in Melitene, they say that meshaja stands for that which a man passes his hand over, across the brim of the measure, when it is measured."

Preface to Book of Obadiah

"The Prophecy of Obadiah. He was from the land of Shakhim. And he was the commander of fifty on whom Elijah had mercy, and he went down with him into the presence of Ahab. He persuaded Elijah, and became a disciple of his. And his wife was she who came to Elisha and spoke in the matter of her two sons, who were being sought for the obligation which had accumulated against their

¹ Sprengling and Graham, op. cit., p. vii.

father, when he nourished the one hundred prophets whom he concealed from Zezebel."

Jonah 1:3

"And Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish."

"That is, to Tarsus. Not because he did not know that God is everywhere, was he fleeing from before him, but because he was aware that grace was passing over from the people to the Gentiles. He was not willing that through him there should come to pass a transition like this."

Jonah 3:4

"And he preached and said, Within forty days, Nineveh is about to be overthrown."

"That is, the Greek says, Yet three days, and Nineveh is about to be overthrown. But we say that both of these are right: namely, he said, From that moment in forty days, at the very point when he was vomited up by the fish, and began to travel on the way. And he said, From this moment in three days, on the very day when he entered the city."

Habakkuk 1:12

"Without law, art thou, O Lord."

"That is, in a sort of doubting and questioning manner he says this,--as though to say, Have you, then, annulled that law, that the killer should be killed, 'that thus you look at the insolent one and art silent,' and dost not kill the wicked one who slays the righteous?"

Zechariah 4:10

"These are the seven eyes of the Lord which look around in all the earth."

"That is, the complete knowledge of the Lord concerning everything that exists; or, the seven operations of the Spirit,--first, of prophecy; second, of intelligence, as of Basli'il; third, of zeal, as of Elijah; fourth, of heroism, as of Joshua the son of Nun; fifth, of knowledge, as of John the Baptist, who knew the Lord and showed him to the crowds; sixth, of reverence, as of David, who hastened towards repentance; seventh, of wisdom, as of Solomon."

Zechariah 7:2

"Serasar and Rabmag."

"That is, these are they whom Darius appointed to rule over the Euphrates, and by their hand he sent these words, 'Shall I weep in the fifth month and shall I abstain, as

I have been doing, behold! how many years,' that is, the Hebrews, in every year, in the month Ab--because therein they were led captive,--observe a feast of weeping, and they are abstinent; and because they had found favor in the eyes of Darius, he also used to weep with them and abstain. On that account he desired to learn whether after the Return they were still observing that rite or if they had ceased, that he might continue or cease. The prophet then, both to him and to them, proclaimed that truth and grace and mercy would abound from the fast."

Zechariah 12:10

"And they shall look upon me as him whom they pierced."

"That is, in the literal sense, they shall make supplication to me in pain because of Judas Maccabeus, when he was slain by the Greeks; and, in the spiritual sense, the Gentiles are turned towards me through him whom they crucified."

Malachi 3:9

"With curses ye are cursed, and me have ye defrauded."

"That is, in the inverse order it is right that this statement be understood; that is to say, Me ye have defrauded in tithes and first fruits, and on this account ye are accursed and your crops destroyed. Or, instead of waw there should be daladh."¹

A review of the Scholia indicates such characteristics as the following: a very free use of materials drawn from a wide range of disciplines--geography, science, philosophy, mathematics, and others; a familiarity with the Biblical text in various versions, and with the interpretations offered by many diverse writers or schools of thought; a desire to supplement vague or ambiguous passages with specific historical, biographical or chronological data; a care, reminding us of the work of the Massorettes, for the spelling and pointing of the Biblical text. and its proper pronunciation, or for matters of grammatical derivation or etymology; a ready acceptance of the orthodox opinion that at least two senses are to be found in the Scripture--the natural, historical or literal meaning, and that which was the

Which would yield the meaning, "Ye. . . who have defrauded me."

"spiritual," particularly in that it was a "type" or "symbol" of a New Testament character or event; and often uncritical acceptance of the medley of Jewish-Christian-Moslem legends which had come to cluster around the great figures and events of the Old Testament; a fervent loyalty to the Church, especially to its dignities and dignitaries, as in his desire to re-establish the status of the priesthood after the Mongol invasions; and (not to lengthen the list unduly), an all too frequent suggestion that Barhebraeus was imperfectly acquainted with the Hebrew text in its grammatical exactness or its syntactical relationships.

By-products emerging in the processes of study offer many themes for investigation. A careful examination has been made of the usage of the term ṣeḥḥā. This is explained by Paine Smith as "exemplar libri, codex"; "versio, e.g. Lxxvirale," and "sectio, pericope." It had been observed that in the first volume of the Scholia--Genesis to II Samuel--none of these meanings was adequate to explain the curious placement of the term in the text. A hypothesis tentatively developed, and subjected to careful mathematical testing within the Minor Prophets, has been thoroughly substantiated: that ṣeḥḥā is to be translated "page," and that its appearance in the text indicates that at the specific point involved, the author had turned to a new "page" of his Biblical material. The hypothesis has been tested against other Old Testament books, and found substantially correct, within the limits of possible error due to our uncertainty as to the specific manuscript used by the original writer. Again, much material is accumulating from the collation processes which should make possible differentia between mere scribal errors or idiosyncracies and true divergent readings, upon which distinction depends

much of the value of judgments as to the critical worth of manuscripts. A third and vast field of investigation remains for the present almost unworked. Clearly the exegesis offered by Barhebraeus is by no means his own fully original work, despite the vigor of his mind. The materials must be traced back up the stream of patristic thought, and derivations and suggestions be brought into clearer light. A trial survey in Bar Salibi, predecessor of our present author by about a century, indicates a surprising parallelism in both selections and comments. Finally, we have contradictory suggestions as to the source from which Barhebraeus drew his knowledge of the readings of the "Greek." Collation with the Syro-Hexaplar, in so far as the specific passages of the Scholia called for this, was inadequate to answer the real question at issue.

This résumé of a study of The Scholia of Barhebraeus on the Book of the Twelve Prophets may be considered as dealing with a representative section of the larger task of presenting our author to the scholarly world, and hence of the still more ambitious proposal for the production of a critical text of the Peshitto. It may serve as an interim "report of progress" in an enterprise whose final achievement will call for years of labor by a large body of workers, in a field quite exacting and often tedious, but whose reward is the opportunity of bringing to clear focus, materials that have for too many centuries lain almost completely out of the purview of scholarship, and for lack of which, exactness in the use of a great ancient version of the Old Testament has been quite impossible.

